

Remarks by H.E. Mr. HAYASHI Hajime,
Ambassador of Japan to the UK,
for Bestowal of the Foreign Minister's Commendation,
upon Ms YAMANAKA Masumi,
on October 7, 2021

Distinguished guests,

In this most suitable setting, I would now like to take this opportunity to bestow upon Ms YAMANAKA Masumi, the Foreign Minister's Commendation. Ms Yamanaka has been a Resident artist of the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew since 2008, and over the years has made an outstanding contribution to the cultural relations between Japan and the United Kingdom.

Ms Yamanaka was the first Japanese resident botanical artist at Kew, tasked with creating meticulously beautiful painted representations of plants for research purposes. She has also been involved in the preservation and organisation of Kew's extensive Japanese collection, helping Japanese and British experts publish the results in journals. Beyond professional spheres, her work in Japan related public exhibitions has been of outstanding quality and importance. Beginning in 2012 she worked on a major exhibition entitled Flora Japonica, which was exhibited at Kew Gardens in 2016 before touring to the National Museum of Nature and Science in Japan between 2017 and 2018. Ms Yamanaka's tireless efforts engaging with institutions across the UK and Japan have meant that the history of exchange through plants between Japan and the UK have become better known to people in both nations, fostering a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation in the botanical world and beyond.

This spirit of fostering connections flows through much of what Ms Yamanaka has achieved, and the inspiration she takes from our two nations are reflected in her work. In 2012, she was inspired by some children from Iwate Prefecture, who visited Kew to donate seeds to the millennium seed bank from a specific species of pine tree. That species is the same as the so called “miracle pine”. The tree, located in RikuzenTakata in Iwate Prefecture was the sole tree to remain standing in a grove of pine trees after the devastating tsunami swept the coast in 2011. The tree became a symbol of resilience and hope for recovery. Ms Yamanaka travelled to Japan to draw the same species of pine as the miracle pine, with the resulting artwork exhibited at the Embassy of Japan on the 5th anniversary of that tragic day. Kew went on to donate the work to the Iwate Tsunami Memorial Museum in RikuzenTakata, in a project of significance to the relations between Japan and the UK.

Ms Yamanaka’s involvement in the Japan related activities of Kew are extensive, and indeed this marvellous festival which we are enjoying the opening of this evening has also involved her, and thus to my mind there is no better time to award this commendation. I would like to invite you all to join me in congratulating Ms Yamanaka Masumi on these achievements as I confer upon her the Foreign Minister’s Commendation.

Ms Yamanaka, congratulations!